

But We See Jesus

Psalm 27:1-8

Hebrews 1:1-3 and 2:5-9

Hebrews 1:1-3

Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways through the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word.

Wow. That's a remarkable statement of the identity and significance of Jesus Christ, and an assurance of the place of Jesus Christ in the creation and the sustaining of all things. Take that in for a moment as I read it again...

The rest of Hebrews 1 is a poetic ascription of praise to Christ, particularly as he is superior to angels. Apparently, there was a fascination with angels at that time, and the author is trying to explain how much Jesus is superior to angels. And this is where we pick it up a few verses later...

Hebrews 2:5-9

⁵Now God did not subject the unfolding world, about which we are speaking, to angels. ⁶But someone has testified somewhere (that somewhere is Psalm 8), "What are human beings that you are mindful of them, or mortals, that you care for them? ⁷You have made them for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned them with glory and honor, ⁸subjecting all things under their feet." Now in subjecting all things to them, God left nothing outside their control. As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to them, ⁹**but we do see Jesus**, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God!

When you think of the world today, or our country, or what's going on around us in our towns and cities, what comes to mind? Or, let me put it this way: what do you see? Ponder that for a moment... what do you see? In your mind's eye (and heart's eye), and also with your physical eyes. What do you see?

That question reminds me of one of our kids' favorite books when they were little: Brown bear, brown bear, what do you see?... ("I see a red bird looking at me. Red bird, red bird, what do you see? I see a yellow duck looking at me..." and so on). I thought this week that it would be fun if someone wrote a book titled, "Christian, Christian, what do you see?" I know some Christians whose first page would say: "I see the world falling apart around me." Well, that's one way to look at things! Others would see the great needs around me, others would see beauty all around me, or all of the above at the same time.

What do you see? That would be an interesting question to respond to in small groups. The writer to the Hebrews shares their response: "...we see Jesus." I love that phrase: but we see Jesus. What this writer is saying is, in the midst of this world, where it looks like things are falling apart, and maybe even heading for disaster, we see Jesus. We see Jesus. Through whom the worlds (plural) were created, and who sustains all things.

The writer first reminds us that when God created the earth and everything in it, and made it good (*very good*, actually, Genesis tells us) God put humans in it to take care of it. The Genesis way of saying it is, we are to “tend the garden.” Not dominate it, but carefully work with it, and *in* it, as part of it. God instructs the first humans to “till it and keep it,” which in Hebrew literally means to serve it and protect it. Serve and protect it.

Sadly (and frustratingly), this Genesis creation account has been misused and misinterpreted in a way that justifies *exploitation* of the earth, and extracting as much as we can from it. That’s a deplorable interpretation of that text which, is actually an indigenous narrative of creation (think about it; it’s a native account of creation), and no indigenous people would ever talk about domination, extraction, or consumption of the earth. The language in Genesis is language of cooperation, caring, and reciprocity. The earth provides for humans, humans give back. It’s meant to be a reciprocal relationship. Where we only take what we need, and provide for the earth in a way so that it can reproduce and regenerate itself, as it always does, according to its own intelligence and design.

Presbyterians love the language of stewardship to describe this. Stewardship is a pretty good word, but I find it lacking because it suggests that the owner has left, after saying “Here’s my stuff; steward it,” then goes on

vacation or something, which isn't true in God's case. But stewardship does suggest that God has dignified humans with the responsibility, and the privilege, of caring for what belongs to God.

That's all to say, the writer of Hebrews reminds us and affirms that God has given humans the responsibility of creation care, stewardship, protecting and serving, living in a reciprocal relationship with this good earth that has been entrusted to us. However we want to say it.

And then writer of Hebrews emphasizes that humans are crowned with glory and honor, quoting from Psalm 8. Think of that. Crowned with glory and honor, you and I are. Think of what a great affirmation that is from God. God says, "*Here—you who are crowned with glory and honor, take care of my world; I trust you with responsibly caring for everything.*" That's amazing. What a privilege! And... how do you feel about the fact that you are 'crowned with glory and honor'? That's a magnificent statement. Perhaps we don't feel that way, but that's who God says you are: you are person made in God's image, crowned with glory and honor. Let that sink in! Please take some time this week to meditate on that truth and what it means to you to be a magnificent creation of God.

Now, even with that being true, that we are magnificent and glorious creations, this writer is realistic about the fact that humans haven't done a very

good job of taking care of the world. Things don't seem under our careful and thoughtful, beneficial stewardship the way they are supposed to be, the way God designed it to be. Does that ring true to you? I'm sure we can all think of ways that careful, beneficial "tending of the garden," so to speak, has either eluded us, or, human selfishness and indifference have *created* distress in the earth, in our world and our country: from poverty & homelessness to climate change, to racism, and our broken political process, and the like.

We don't see things under our loving care as they ought to be.

The writer of Hebrews is honest that not everything is right in this world, or sometimes in our lives. And the writer doesn't attempt to make sense of the world and what's wrong. The author doesn't give us answers to the questions of why things go bad or attempt to explain things away.

What the writer *does* give us is new vision, and hope: "...but we *do* see Jesus." This is one of the great turn of phrases in the Bible. "As it is, we don't see everything under human control (in other words, we have *lost* control... things are *out of control*); *but we do see Jesus.*"

Things may not be going the way God or we intended them to be. But we do see Jesus. To put this in our contemporary context, we could say:

We don't see the humble, simple use and sharing of earth's resources under our control; but we do see Jesus.

We don't see preventable disease under our control; but we do see Jesus.

We don't see human thriving and equality under our control, but we do see Jesus.

We don't see the right and humble exercise of power under our control, but we do see Jesus.

We don't see... (fill in the blank) under our control. But we do see Jesus.

We see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, (in other words, human just like us) and is now crowned with glory and honor, the writer says, *because he suffered death.*" Because he suffered death. Not crowned with glory and honor because he solved all of the world's problems, cured all illness and disease, and there is nothing wrong any more. Not crowned with glory and honor because he got rid of all bad people and now we don't have a care in the world.

Not even because he was raised from the dead. That's what I think it ought to say if I were reading this for the very first time—that he is crowned with glory and honor because he was resurrected to life at Easter. But it doesn't say that.

It says, "crowned with glory and honor *because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.*" That's a very important

truth for the New Testament writers, all the way to the end. In Revelation 5, for example, there is this vision of heavenly victory and celebration where everyone sings “Worthy, worthy, worthy is Jesus, the lamb of God...” Why? Because he suffered death. Not because he’s a mighty conqueror, but because he became human like us; to suffer what we suffer, *as* we suffer. He chose the path of weakness and humility—which is actually is a path of great strength btw. It takes a lot more strength to set aside power and choose humility. And that’s such good news. Jesus was one of us. Jesus is no stranger to human pain and suffering, and he loves us in the midst of it when we experience it.

Years ago, I attended a seminar led by a Presbyterian college professor who told the story of when he was in a terrible car accident that crushed his ribs on one side and left him with several other broken bones, in excruciating pain, and barely able to breathe. He was taken by ambulance to the nearest hospital, which happened to be a Catholic hospital. As he was being wheeled from the ambulance into the emergency department, above the outside entrance was a crucifix. Although he is protestant/Presbyterian and we don’t normally portray Jesus on the cross as the Catholics do, he said it was the most comforting and reassuring thing, in his pain and distress and wondering if he was going to live or die, to see Jesus there, in pain and distress, his face looking down right at him,

sympathizing with him in *his* pain and distress. Knowing that, even if he died, Jesus knew that experience. He said he felt the presence of Jesus like he'd never felt it before, and it changed his life from then on. Because Jesus is no stranger to suffering. Or to a world in turmoil!

Again, we don't see everything carefully stewarded, to use our Presbyterian lingo; but we do see Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of his suffering.

What it tells us is that we have hope. In the midst of the *world's* trouble, Jesus is present. In the midst of a troubled *nation* Jesus is present. And in the midst of our challenging *lives* Jesus is present, loving and blessing and reassuring us. He walks with us, he suffers with us. We can have hope.

And as we fix our eyes on Jesus, he gives us new vision for our lives and for the wider world—to *see* where he is present and where he is at work, and be encouraged by that. And then hear and respond to the invitation to partner with him in his good work in the world. Because... not everything is messed up. There is good, and God is at work doing good. We just have to work a little harder to see it because it doesn't make headlines or appear very often in social media. We have been trained to see the bad; so we have to find the good. As Fred Rogers often said: "When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, "Look for the helpers. You will always find people who

are helping.” And Fred Rogers *the minister* would add, that’s where you’ll see God at work.

The phrase “but we see Jesus” is actually an invitation to change what we are looking at—literally and figuratively. To change our vision; to change where we put our attention, and what we dwell upon. Because our tendency is to focus our attention on our problems, or the problems of the world, rather than on Jesus. It’s natural for us to dwell on what’s wrong in in the world. It can almost be addicting (in fact there is now scientific/biological evidence to prove that it *is* addicting). However, if that’s where I dwell, and that’s what I think about, then that’s what I’ve trained my eyes to see and it’s what I *will* see. And then it becomes hard to have hope.

What the Biblical writers tell us is: don’t focus on your problems or the world’s problems, focus on Jesus—at least as a starting place. Take your problems *to* Jesus, but don’t stare at your problems or obsess about them. Look at Jesus, look to Jesus. And let him put your problems, and the world’s problems, into proper perspective. And then adjust your vision to see the good, to see where he is at work, and then be encouraged to take your Jesus vision out into the world and be part of the good, healing and reconciling work.

A little later in Hebrews (chapter 12, which was our assurance this morning) the writer says this: *“Let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us; let us look to Jesus (literally in the Greek, “let us fix our eyes on Jesus), the pioneer and perfecter of our faith; who, for the joy set before him (that’s you and me!), endured the cross...”* It’s another way of saying basically the same thing—that Jesus suffered death, in solidarity with us. “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus.” Just like a runner doesn’t stare at the ground during the entire race, or stare at the *obstacles*, but keeps her eyes fixed on a goal in front of her as she runs, we look to Jesus as we go through life.

This isn’t avoidance or turning a blind eye to the problems we face, but a way to gain new vision, and to let Jesus give us wisdom and courage and perspective on everything, so we can then act wisely and lovingly, in a way that brings healing and hope.

So, I’m anticipating the question: what does it mean to *see* Jesus? How do we see Jesus when Jesus isn’t here, physically? What does it mean to see his face, or God’s face, when there is no actual face to look at? In Psalm 27 we heard David tell us that his heart is telling him to seek God’s face, and he resolves to do just that. What does that mean?

Two things: one, the word “to see” also means “to know.” It means to have a clear vision of something or someone, in the sense that I *understand* something or someone. So, to say “I see you” can also mean “I know you.” I get you. I understand you. Or at least I’d *like to* know and understand you!

Same with the concept of a face. In ancient cultures, someone’s face, or countenance, was a reflection of who they are as a person. It symbolized their identity, and... their presence. So, David, in the psalm, is saying, “my heart is leading me to seek God’s presence... Help me to find your presence, O God.” So I can know you.

During the covid pandemic, when we were sheltering at home, we all learned that we much prefer face-to-face meetings with people over Zoom meetings, right? But Zoom was better than nothing! Because we at least could still see each other’s faces. That is, if people turned on their camera!

That’s because our presence, our seeing a face, is so powerful, and impactful. Like a baby looking for their mother’s face; it’s their first instinct, for making a connection, bonding, and seeking the assurance of presence.

So, to see Jesus is to know Jesus, and to look in his face is to look into his identity, to acknowledge and access his presence.

Practically speaking, how do we see Jesus, as the author of Hebrews says?

How do we “fix our eyes on Jesus”?

Well, we see Jesus when we read and reflect on the New Testament witness to Jesus, which tells us who he is and what he does, and what he has said. As part of that, we can reflect on an attribute of Jesus, or God, as told in Scripture. Take time to reflect on mercy, for example. Or faithfulness. For a day, or a week.

We see Jesus when we quiet our minds and take time to still ourselves and create space to pray, and listen—maybe even using our imagination to visualize that Jesus is next to us, walking with us, or sitting next to us. Some traditions leave an empty chair for Jesus when they gather, some people I know do this in their private times of contemplation, to remind them of his presence. Try this, but don’t get distracted by what you think Jesus is supposed to look like, what he’s wearing, and all that. It isn’t important. Just acknowledge, in your heart, that he is there.

We see Jesus when we remember what he’s done for us. Don’t dwell in the past, but prayerfully remember specific times when you experienced his help and presence, and let that help you see Jesus as you move forward.

We can see Jesus when we look for the good, and find the good around us, like Mr. Rogers encouraged us to do.

We see Jesus in the communion elements: his body given for you; his blood shed for you. Visible reminders of his love and his presence in your life. Elements that you can see, touch, smell, and taste.

We sang a new song this morning, Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus, which says “and the things of earth will grow strangely dim, in the light of his glory and grace.” I’d like to reframe that so it says, or means, “and the things of earth will be put into perspective” in the light of his glory and grace. Whether the “things of the earth” are the upcoming election and political upheaval in general, or something going on in our communities, or your life or your family’s life. If we can take time each day to set everything aside for a moment, turn our eyes upon Jesus, however you and I do that, we can then return to our everyday mysticism to find Christ, find God, in all things, even the difficult things, because he is there.

Crown Him with Many Crowns. It’s not your dentist’s favorite song. But a song taken from that scene in Revelation that I referenced, of the glorified Jesus Christ, because he died for us.